
COUGHS AND COLDS



What it is

Coughs and colds are very common. Most are caused by viruses and get better by themselves.

A cough is your body's way of clearing mucus or irritation from the airways. Most coughs improve within 2 to 3 weeks, although they can sometimes last a little longer after a virus.

Common symptoms

- Runny or blocked nose
- Sore throat
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Tiredness, headache, earache or a mild fever

Mucus can become yellow or green as a cold progresses. This does not usually mean you need antibiotics.

Types of cough

A dry cough often feels like a tickle in the throat. It usually does not bring up phlegm.

A chesty cough brings up phlegm or mucus. This can be helpful because it clears mucus from the airways.

What causes coughs and colds?

Most coughs and colds are caused by viral infections. Antibiotics do not help most coughs and colds because antibiotics do not treat viruses. They can also cause side effects and contribute to antibiotic resistance.

Self-care and treatment

Most coughs and colds can be managed at home. You can help symptoms by:

- resting when you need to
- drinking enough fluids
- eating when you feel able to
- avoiding smoking and smoky places
- using saline nose drops or spray for a blocked nose

COVID-19 and flu

COVID-19, flu and colds can cause similar symptoms. Most people with mild symptoms can recover at home with rest, fluids and simple symptom relief.

Try to stay at home and avoid close contact with people who are at higher risk of serious illness if you have a high temperature or feel too unwell to do your normal activities.

Medicines that may help

Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with fever, headache, sore throat, earache and aches. Always follow the dose instructions.

Some cough and cold medicines already contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, so check the packet carefully to avoid taking too much. Do not give aspirin to children under 16.

There is limited evidence that cough medicines help. Honey and lemon may soothe a cough or sore throat in adults and children over 1 year old. Do not give honey to babies under 12 months.

Children under 6 should not usually have over-the-counter cough and cold medicines, including decongestants, unless advised by a GP or pharmacist.

Decongestant nasal sprays and drops

- Sprays or drops such as xylometazoline or oxymetazoline can help a blocked nose for a short time.
- Do not use them for more than 5 days.
- Using them for longer can make congestion worse and can damage the lining of the nose.
- Ask a pharmacist before using a decongestant if you take regular medicines, have high blood pressure or heart problems, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or are choosing medicine for a child.

Steam and blocked noses

Steam may help some people with a blocked nose. A safer option is to sit in the bathroom with a hot shower running.

Do not put your head over a bowl of hot water, especially for children, because of the risk of scalding.

What the practice can do

Most coughs and cold do not need to see a healthcare professional. However, if you feels you illness is not following the anticipated course or you have other health concerns, please send in a triage via our website. If deemed necessary following triage, the GP or practice nurse or paramedic or a same day

primary care practitioner at Cirencester hospital, can assess you if symptoms suggest something more serious, such as pneumonia, asthma, COPD flare-up or another illness. This may include checking your temperature, oxygen level, breathing and chest.

Antibiotics are only needed if there are signs of a bacterial infection. Most coughs and colds do not need antibiotics.

When to seek help

Manage at home	Most coughs and colds improve with rest, fluids and simple symptom relief.
Contact a pharmacist or the practice	Symptoms are not improving after 3 weeks, your cough is getting worse, you are pregnant, or you have asthma, COPD, heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, a weakened immune system, or you are worried about a child, older person or frail person.
Call 999 or go to A&E now	Severe shortness of breath, chest pain that does not go away, blue or grey lips or face, confusion, severe drowsiness, or a child working hard to breathe, grunting, or having pauses in breathing.

Seek same-day advice from NHS 111 or the practice if you have a high temperature and feel very unwell, are struggling to drink, are passing much less urine than usual, cough up blood-stained phlegm, have chest pain when breathing or coughing, or your symptoms improve then suddenly get much worse.

How to reduce spread

- wash your hands regularly
- catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue and throw it away
- avoid close contact with people who are at higher risk if you feel very unwell
- keep rooms ventilated where possible

Further reading and resources

NHS: Common cold

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/common-cold/>

NHS: Colds, coughs and ear infections in children

<https://www.nhs.uk/baby/health/colds-coughs-and-ear-infections-in-children/>

NHS: COVID-19

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/>

Patient.info: Coughs and colds in children

<https://patient.info/chest-lungs/cough-leaflet/coughs-and-colds-in-children>

Further information and contacting us

If you need help, the best way to contact us is through the CHG online contact form:

<https://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us/>

If you cannot use the online form, please call the practice on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122.

For urgent medical advice when we are closed, call NHS 111.

In an emergency, call 999.